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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#)  
SUBJECT: THE POWERS OF JULY 22 BLOC: ONE HIT WONDER?

Classified By: Classified by PolMinsCouns Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.  
4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On July 29, Dr. Habib Jabir Habib, an independent Shia Council of Representatives (COR) member and political analyst for the pan-Arab daily newspaper, Al-Sharq al-Awsat, told Poloff that the Kirkuk issue united the "Powers of July 22" to pass the (subsequently vetoed) Provincial Elections Law (PEL). However, he added that the competing goals and ideologies of the bloc's diverse members may preclude true unity. Jabir was especially dismissive about the long-term prospects of the hardline core of the July 22 bloc, which includes the National Dialogue Front, Fadhilah, Iraqiyya, the Sadr Trend, and Ibrahim Jaafari's National Reform Trend. Of more significance to Jabir was the defection of several members of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), including Dawa, Dawa Tanzim, and some Shia independents, who broke from the UIA to join with the renegade July 22 group to vote through the controversial PEL. Though it is too early to determine the implications of this action, Jabir hinted that this may foretell an eventual split within the UIA. Despite Jabir's bleak prognosis, it should be noted that the July 22 bloc achieved important success in overcoming - for the first time ever - a Kurdish walkout from the Council of Representatives (CoR). While ethnically and ideologically diverse, the group shares a common antipathy toward the Maliki government. With controversial issues on the horizon such as the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) and the hydrocarbons law, it is feasible that this or a similar bloc may coalesce again to achieve its objectives in the CoR. End Summary.

JULY 22 BLOC - IS IT DURABLE ?  
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¶2. (C) The ability of the "Powers of July 22" bloc to bring together a diverse, multisectarian group of political parties and actors should not be discounted. However, noted political analyst and independent Shia COR member Dr. Jabir Habib Jabir told Poloff on July 29 that it would be presumptuous to assume that their ability to pass the controversial July 22 election law over Kurdish objections signals a new era in Iraqi politics. Despite their unity on the PEL, in which nationalist sentiments in many cases trumped party and bloc loyalty, the competing and often conflicting political goals and ideologies of the different members of the "Powers of July 22" make the future viability of this political group questionable. In Jabir's estimation, July 22 was a one-off event, and it is unlikely that this collection of diverse parties and individuals finding common cause again in the future.

¶3. (C) Jabir was also dismissive of the recently-formed National Dialogue Front/Fadhilah/Iraqiyya/Sadr Trend/National Reform Trend alliance, the hardline core of the July 22 group. Although with 85 CoR seats the alliance is impressive in number, Jabir asserted that the often conflicting agendas and interests of the alliance's parties, as well as sectarian mistrust, do not bode well for the future of this group. Critics of the group, including Qassam Sahlani and Dr. Abdulhadi al-Hassani of Dawa Tanzim, have dismissed its

long-term survival, telling Poloff that the only thing uniting this group is their opposition to the GOI. Conversations with the leaders of Fadhilah, Iraqiyya, and the National Dialogue Front also reveal profound ideological, regional, and sectarian differences among the alliance's members. Even Dr. Saleh al-Mutlaq, the leader of the National Dialogue Front whose visibility has increased significantly during negotiations for a PEL compromise, admitted as much, stating in an August 4 meeting that the bloc members' interests and ideologies may be "too different" to bridge, and that for the present the group was merely coordinating on certain issues.

#### OTHER POLITICAL DIVORCES IN STORE ?

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¶4. (C) According to Jabir, the real political development that is likely to occur in the upcoming months is the fragmentation of the UIA. To Jabir, there are fundamental differences between the two Dawa parties, Dawa and Dawa Tanzim, and ISCI, particularly regarding the influence of Iran on the bloc. Expounding on this issue, Jabir said that though many members of the two Dawa parties spent time in exile in Iran and maintain good relations with the Iranians, they still view themselves first and foremost as Iraqis and Arabs. Their stance on the PEL, in which they broke from their bloc and sided with July 22, reflected their nationalist outlook. In Dr. Jabir's estimation, a UIA breakup may be inevitable, which could portend a radical restructuring of the political landscape. It should be noted, though, that some important Dawa figures, most notably Haider al-Abadi, appeared to rejoin ranks with the UIA after

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the July 22 vote. Abadi participated in some of the UIA strategy sessions during the first week of August. That said, in the closed-door talks about a PEL text in early August, Abadi often took stands much closer to the Sunni Arabs than to the Kurds and their ISCI friends. Abadi was also notably very friendly and relaxed with the Sunni Arabs throughout the sometimes tense negotiations.

#### COMMENT

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¶5. Comment: Despite considerable hoopla surrounding the emergence of the "July 22" political bloc, their sudden arrival on the Iraqi political stage does not necessarily indicate a seismic shift in Iraqi politics. At this point, it would be premature to consider it a new political bloc along the lines of the UIA, Tawafuq, or the Kurdish alliance.

It does, nevertheless, represent a significant development in that parties sharing antipathy to PM Maliki and the Kurds have joined forces to bring a bill to vote despite - for the first time - a Kurdish walkout from the CoR. With other controversial items on the agenda, including the SFA and hydrocarbons legislation, this newly emboldened July 22 group may yet again find common cause. Of perhaps greater significance is the potential fragmentation of the UIA, an event that could herald a new era in Iraqi politics. End Comment.

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